



The Estuarine Crocodile (*Crocodilus porosus*) on Whitarkanika Island

(Photo : M. Krishnan)

method of dispersal of seeds). Only a few individuals and not all domestic fowls in this area have the habit of eating this fruit. The unripe fruits with latex do not poison them.

Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) is the only bird which is addicted to this fruit. In all other cases the occasional individuals observed to eat this fruit shows that they had developed this habit accidentally. Many more stray instances of birds and mammals eating this fruit are likely to come to our notice in future.

DEPARTMENT OF ZOOLOGY,  
MADRAS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE,  
TAMBARAM, MADRAS-59.

SIMON G. RAJASINGH

'LALGUDI COTTAGE',  
S/8, STAFF COLONY,  
TAMBARAM, MADRAS-59,  
July 20, 1970.

IRENE V. RAJASINGH

[Dr. S.R. Amladi, M.D. of the Topiwalla National Medical College, comments—  
'The note by Mr. Simon Rajasingh and Irene V. Rajasingh is very interesting since it reveals that there may be a species difference in withstanding the effects of the glycosides of the plant.

The references available to me certainly assert that the plant is poisonous especially to human beings. Mody in his TEXTBOOK OF MEDICAL JURISPRUDENCE AND TOXICOLOGY (1969) states 'The plant is highly poisonous & contains as active principles two glycosides: *thevetin* and *cerberin*. Both these glycosides reside in the milky juice which exudes from all parts of the plant.'

In large doses they are heart poisons, but in minute amounts they are heart tonics; in fact, *thevetin* has been used successfully in the treatment of heart disease in man. Species difference in the actions of these glycosides is not surprising as the Rat (*Rattus norvegicus*), which is a common animal used in our laboratories, is highly resistant to their actions, and requires nearly fifty times the fatal dosage for man.—Eds.]

### 13. THE ESTUARINE CROCODILE. *CROCODILUS POROSUS* SCHNEIDER OFF THE ORISSA COAST

(With a plate)

Whitarkanika is an island in the Bay of Bengal, off the Chandbali coast in Orissa and originally belonged to the Raja of Kanika, who introduced sambar, chital and other wild animals into the island long ago. I understand that steps are being taken to proclaim this a sanctuary. If this is done, it will be the only estuarine sanctuary of its kind in the country, for I understand that it is distinct in flora, fauna and terrain from the mangrove forests of the Sunderbans.

I had, in the course of two trips in a motor-boat (a huge vessel—no slim launch) mere glimpses of two crocs basking on the bank and a longer look at the largest of them, of which I took 2 photographs. I thought the big one was at least 16 feet long. Having no authority on reptiles with me, I looked up *Crocodilus porosus* in Methuen's REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS OF THE WORLD by Hans Hwass. In it I find this note on the creature: '12-14 ft., exceptionally to 20 ft. Found from the east coast of India and Ceylon, through Indonesia and Northern Australia to the Fiji Islands . . . more marine than any of the other crocodiles . . . one of the most dangerous of all the crocodilians.' The illustration by Wilhelm Eigener shows a crocodile that is less broad-snouted than the one in my picture in a top view—as in my picture but otherwise very similar. This means nothing as the artist probably had never seen the animal.

I stick to my estimate of 16 feet. I have, long ago, seen some crocodiles (*Crocodilus palustris*) in the Cauvery around Srirangapatna in Mysore which were probably as long or even may be a few inches longer, but they were slim by comparison. What impressed me greatly about this animal in my pictures was its tremendous bulk, rather than its length. Even one of the smaller crocs seen (may be about 10 ft. long) was bulky. I could not see the third one clearly enough to estimate size, as it was in the water.

The pictures, taken from a boat going fast and vibrating fearfully, are not sharp. To get a good picture of the estuarine crocodile at Whitarkanika, one needs a well camouflaged and seaworthy sail-boat and a week of patrolling the narrow canals between the islands.

Whitarkanika should certainly be a valuable sanctuary for crocodiles and water monitors if their hunting here can be effectively stopped—both are getting steadily rarer.

PERUNKULAM HOUSE,  
EDWARD ELLIOT ROAD,  
MYLAPORE, MADRAS-4,  
October 14, 1970.

M. KRISHNAN

#### 14. THE OCCURRENCE OF THE DOG-FACED WATER-SNAKE, *CERBERUS RHYNCHOPS* (SCHNEIDER) (SERPENTES: COLUBRIDAE) AROUND MADRAS

Further to the localities recorded by Whitaker (1969)<sup>1</sup> for this snake around Bombay, it may be noted that this species is equally abundant on the Madras coast and in estuaries around the city.

<sup>1</sup> WHITAKER, R. (1969): The Dog-Faced watersnake (*C. rhynchops*) in the Bombay area & Notes on its habits. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 66 (2): 386.